

Brother LeRoy Viera, S.M.

Lewis Viera was born on December 28, 1926, the Feast of the Holy Innocents. He had many years to live down being born on that auspicious date. He was named Lewis but was called LeRoy from his birth. He discovered LeRoy was not his name when he enlisted in the service. Because of a realistic costume of a hobo he wore for Halloween during his Grammar School days, his family called him "bummie".

LeRoy is the fifth child born of his parents. He has three older brothers and an older sister. He refers to himself as an after-thought; his father said he was a mistake. He was born and raised in the town of Antioch, on the Sacramento River. His parents went through the depression, making a lot of money, losing it, and reestablishing themselves by hard work, planning and determination. LeRoy carried these characteristics with him to his death.

School never captured LeRoy's passion. His strength was working with his hands, building, repairing and creating. He spent many hours working in the vineyard and walking the distance between his family's property and the town. It was during this time that God moved into his life in a significant way. God was someone LeRoy could talk to, share his frustrations with, and someone from whom he would get advice. He says he did a lot of talking with God during his trips to town and the time he worked in the fields.

When the Second World War came along, his older brothers joined the navy. LeRoy signed up with the Coast Guard as soon as he was eighteen, even though he was still in high school. After training, he was assigned to a ship that was both a hospital ship and a troop transport. He sailed from the San Francisco Bay Area through the Panama Canal to England to transport a Group of CB's to the Pacific Conflict after the European phase of the war was concluded. After many tries to find a place that would take the workers, they finally unloaded them in the Philippines. The ship took on civilians, who were held as prisoners during the Japanese occupation, and wounded service men to bring back to the West Coast.

They sailed through dangerous, submarine-infested waters traveling along the Aleutian Islands, along the West Coast of Canada, past Portland back to the San Francisco Bay without any insignia indicating that they were a hospital ship. He says that for the two and a half years he was in the Coast Guard, he never missed a Christmas at home. While in the Coast Guard, LeRoy finished his high school studies, and, ever, though his high school class graduated without him, he still got his diploma.

When he was discharged from the Coast Guard, LeRoy went to work for Dow Chemical in Pittsburg, California. For four years he worked in the warehouse and went to school at night to be trained in carpentry. When he finished school, he got a job as a carpenter for the local paper mill. An accident at the paper mill where one of his friends was killed, and the subsequent injustices by the management to the survivors, caused LeRoy to look at his life, where he was going and what he wanted to do in the future.

He decided he wanted to become a Religious. He had heard about Religious Brothers and thought that might be a possibility for him. He first approached the Dominicans, who staffed his parish in Antioch. Leroy said the Provincial was visiting and sent him a message that he did not have time to meet. So he contacted the Jesuits. He did not have Latin, so that disqualified him with them. He then contacted Mr. Angel, the Benedictines. That also did not work out. LeRoy said he probably did not ask the right questions when he was seeking information.

While driving a cousin who was joining the Army to Fort Ord in Monterey, California, he shared his dream about becoming a Religious Brother. His cousin pointed out a large building on a hill outside of Santa Cruz as they passed and shared with LeRoy what he had heard about the Marianists who worked there. After delivering his cousin and on the way home, LeRoy stopped by Chaminade in Santa Cruz and found the religious community he would be identified with to his death.

Even though he was older, he moved in with the Postulants on January 2, 1952, and started his Novitiate August 1, taking first vows August 15th the next year. He stayed on as a staff member of the Novitiate for nine years. He said maybe the superiors thought his Novitiate hadn't really taken, and he needed more time. From the Novitiate he went to the Second Novitiate in Missouri. Maybe his theory was correct.

He then went to Hawaii to work in maintenance at Saint Louis School. He remembered building a volcano for a school dance that caught fire - the students thought it was great; they thought it was part of the entertainment. Then he went to Chaminade College Preparatory in Los Angeles, California, when the school was in Cheviot Hill and again when it was in Canoga Park where he put on Luaus, drove a VW Van to pick up students besides doing maintenance. He was then assigned to the General Administration in Rome where he was chauffeur for the Superior General (because the Superior General had crashed a car). The Superior General was a Frenchman who always knew how to get everywhere and was a back-seat-driver. LeRoy learned the art of diplomacy by listening to the man while going the correct way and getting him to his destination on time. He then moved to Walla Walla, Washington, where he learned to navigate in the snow. He was then assigned to Archbishop Mitty High School in San Jose where he had a dog for a short time - until his fellow Brothers prevailed on him to find it a new home. He then worked with four other Marianists to construct a Provincialate, a Retirement Home for elderly Marianists and a Novitiate. All these projects were done in Cupertino. He worked with the construction crew for seven years. While on this project he lost an eye because of an accident.

When the construction was finished, LeRoy attended the 100-day renewal program at *Sangre De Cristo* in New Mexico. After the session, the Christian Brothers asked that he stay on as a member of the staff. The request was approved and he stayed there for two and a half years.

When he finished, LeRoy did one more year in Walla Walla, Washington, before going to Serra High School in Gardena. He was at Serra for six years. During that time he endeared himself to the parents. One of the mothers said that she had

never met a Whiteman named LeRoy. He always worked to improve the physical plant, to the consternation of Bro. Hilarion, the plant supervisor of the Archdiocese. LeRoy always saw that the assembly area was properly set up and that the PA worked. The word was passed down once that Bro. LeRoy should be the one to go up on the ladder to change the gym lights because, if there was an accident, they would not have to pay the insurance. The cafeteria was always prepared for lunch, the toilets worked and the artistic expressions of the students were expunged. During one of the rainy seasons, he ended up bailing water out of the courtyard so the classroom would not flood - the sump-pump was not working. He called Bingo and collected money for parking at the football games - even charging the Bishop when he attended one of Serra's games - no favorites.

While at Serra he came over the Brothers' residence in Canoga, along with Frank Fanger, to reconstruct the Brother's Chapel, from the ground up.

After Serra, Bro. LeRoy was assigned to Chaminade College Preparatory in West Hills. The students loved him at Chaminade as did students of all the school where he was assigned. They knew that if something needed fixing, set up, found or if they just needed a helping hand, they could count on Bro. LeRoy. He was the Director of the Marianist Community at Chaminade for six years.

He took up glazing ceramic figurines. He finished 150 statues of the Blessed Virgin, one for each classroom and each office of the school (on both campuses). He sold or gave away about the same number to people who wanted one for their own. Bro. LeRoy also made the same statues for all the classrooms and offices at Saint Louis School in Hawaii. He was involved in staging a making the sets for the two drama productions each year.

Bro. LeRoy was never the person out in front of what was going on in any project, unless it was installing timber on a roof or driving a big piece of equipment. He made his impact over a long period of time by always being there to put something together, build a set for a play, pour a slab of concrete, move chairs and tables or put out food and clean up. He always surprised those in charge by completing a task that was needed but was mentioned in passing. He would be

there to show students how to do things and praise them when they did a good job and correct them as they succeeded. When everyone else went home at the end of the work day more often than not Bro. LeRoy would stay behind and either finish the job or bring it to near completion.

Bro. LeRoy would tease, laugh, complement and praise. He was always there, pitching in, quiet, contributing and supporting. He would make faces; stick out his tongue and laugh.

By his death, Bro LeRoy has two lessons to teach us. First, we are all eventually going to join him in heaven. We are all pilgrims in this world. We are on this earth for a short time. Our home is in heaven. Second, love and friendship are all that endure. Those are the only two achievements we take with us when we go to the next life - our capacity to love and our ability to give ourselves in love and friendship.

Even though Bro. LeRoy is not physically with us any longer, he is still in our midst. He resides in our memories, in the experiences and love he shared with us. We are all changed and influenced by the people we let into our lives, especially those who bring love. It is in that context that Bro. LeRoy touched us and changed us. He is with God and remembers us as he stands in the presence of God.